

## Iran: Patterns of Assassination

Iran's policy of assassinating oppositionists has changed little under President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani. As the accompanying graphics show, the number of assassinations conducted by Iran has stayed roughly constant during Rafsanjani's tenure. Since 1989, Iran has carried out an average of five assassinations annually, and groups supported by Tehran—particularly radical Turkish Islamists—average another two killings annually.

Key targets have remained largely unchanged during Rafsanjani's tenure. Most Iranian assassination targets are members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq or the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I). Iran attacks these two groups much more frequently than the third key Iranian target, supporters of the son of the former Shah of Iran. Some specific targets have changed to adapt to alterations in Iranian foreign policy: Saudi diplomats were attacked during 1989 and 1990—shortly after Saudi Arabia executed the Kuwaiti Shia responsible for bombings at the hajj in 1989—but have not been targeted since.

### Surrogates

Iran rarely relies on surrogates to conduct assassinations of Iranian oppositionists.

Iran typically relies on surrogates for attacks on non-Iranians. Turkish Islamic groups supported by Iran, for example, are responsible for killing a handful of secular Turkish journalists and a member of Parliament since 1989. In addition, attacks on foreigners in Turkey—including the attempted murder of Jewish businessman Jak Kamhi (1993) and the bombings that killed US serviceman Victor Marvick (1991) and Israeli security officer Ehud Sadan (1992)—have been linked to Islamic groups backed by Iran.

### Venues

Although the pace and targets of Iranian assassinations are not changing significantly, a review of killings since 1989 suggests that Iran is killing fewer oppositionists in Europe and more in Southwest Asia, particularly Turkey and Iraq (see graphic on regional distribution of assassinations). We suspect this change results from Iran's interest in protecting its diplomatic and economic initiatives in Europe. We note that the drop in assassinations in Europe began in 1993, when Iran began experiencing difficulties in repaying foreign loans and the United States increased pressure on European countries to halt credits to Iran. Countries surrounding Iran, particularly Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan, offer a wealth of targets, and killings in those countries result in less diplomatic backlash for Iran than assassinations in Europe.

Despite the apparent shift from Europe and the increased focus on assassinations in Southwest Asia, we have noted several suspicious murders of oppositionists in Europe during the past year. We cannot confirm that they were carried out by Iran, and we have not included them in our statistics. These attacks include:

- *17 January 1994, Bagarmossen, Sweden.* A member of the KDP-I was severely injured by a letter-bomb addressed to his wife, also a KDP-I member, according to defense attache reporting.
- *11 October 1994, Oslo, Norway.* William Nygaard, Norwegian publisher of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, was shot near his home.

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